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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum
RSB-171, October 26, 1962

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH : S/S
FROM : DNR - Roger Hilsman

Roger Hilsman

SUBJECT: Probable Soviet Attitude Toward Potential Denuclearization Proposals

The Brazilian draft UN resolution proposing the creation of a Latin American and African nuclear free zone as an answer to the problem of Soviet missile deployments in Cuba poses the question of how the Soviet Union will respond.

ABSTRACT

We believe that for tactical reasons Moscow will almost certainly not reject such a proposal out of hand, but will attempt to manipulate the discussion of it to serve the purposes of maintaining the Soviet missiles in place, at least for the time being while generating political pressures on the US to desist from its quarantine and to refrain from any further actions against the Cuban regime.

However, the Soviet Union's interest in agreeing to honor and participate in implementing an agreement on a Latin American or geographically broader denuclearization arrangement is likely to depend upon Moscow's estimate of the prospects for maintaining its missiles in Cuba. Unless the Soviets were certain that their missiles would be forced out of Cuba, they probably would not wish to participate in an agreement. So long as Moscow believes that it can continue to draw out negotiations and keep its bases intact, the Soviets are likely to bloc any agreement by setting prohibitively high terms.

Tactics in the Cuban Crisis

Tactically, Moscow almost certainly will welcome the opportunity for negotiations offered by denuclearization proposals. By making a show of reasonableness and willingness to negotiate, the Soviets will hope to bring political pressure to bear on the US to drop its "blockade." The Soviet Union would also hope that the US would be inhibited from taking any further actions against the Soviet presence in Cuba while the negotiations were in progress, and Moscow may well hope that if the negotiations continue long enough their missile bases in Cuba will have become a part of the status quo.

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While the exact form of Moscow's response to a particular denuclearization plan cannot be foreseen with certainty, the USSR would in effect agree in principle to negotiations while leaving itself room for diplomatic maneuver once the talks were under way. In the event that the US sought to impose removal of Soviet missiles as a pre-condition for talks, Moscow would probably refuse, or make a counterproposal such as cessation of the "blockade" combined with a moratorium on further importation of armaments into Cuba. The USSR would calculate that the US would soon be under sufficient pressure to begin negotiations to be forced to accept something less than the elimination of the Soviet missiles as a pre-condition.

Either in arranging for the negotiations, or once they had begun, the Soviets would probably seek to broaden them to include nuclear free zones elsewhere and could seek to introduce other nuclear disarmament proposals into the talks. Moscow has an elaborate catalogue of possible proposals such as those for freezing or eliminating foreign bases, or for nonuse of nuclear weapons at its disposal. The controls required for implementation of such an agreement would also afford an opportunity for prolonged discussion. Soviet capacity for obfuscation in the field of disarmament is virtually unlimited. The Soviet Union would count on being able to protract the talks, while at the same being able to preclude agreement by raising demands which the West could not accept. A demand that the US not move warships carrying nuclear weapons through the Panama canal would be one example.

Soviet Advocacy of Denuclearization in the Past

Historically, the Soviet Union has favored a variety of nuclear free zone proposals, placing heaviest emphasis on the Central European region. Moscow's main purpose in supporting such plans and proposals -- even in those cases where the Soviet Union was virtually certain that the West would never agree to them -- has been to inhibit US deployments overseas and to raise problems for the US alliance structure. The USSR has long considered deployment of potentially hostile nuclear weapons around its periphery to be detrimental to its politico-military interests and has sought through diplomacy, agitation and threat to change this situation.

Effects Upon Alliances

The foregoing considerations are in part still operative. The Soviet Union almost certainly estimates that the Soviet deployment in Cuba is of far greater value militarily than the US deployments in Italy and Turkey, but Moscow

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would still like to talk about the removal of US weapons from the territory of Allied countries in order to generate tensions between the US and its allies, and to call into question the entire structure of US military alliances.

Moscow would have some concern for its own alliances and commitments. The Cubans would need reassurance, and the Soviets might support a Cuban demand for the removal of Guantanamo and a US guarantee of Cuba's safety. The Chinese Communists could hardly be expected to accept a Pacific nuclear free zone, and would probably regard Soviet initiation of negotiations on that subject as a singularly unfriendly act. Moscow would probably seek to avoid inclusion of the UAR and Iraq (who have in the past made approaches to Moscow opposing the idea of a Middle Eastern denuclearization scheme) in the zone to be discussed.

Soviet Interest in an Agreement

The deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba has doubtless introduced a new element into Soviet calculations on the value of actually concluding an agreement on creating nuclear free zones. The Soviet deployment in Cuba is in purely strategic terms of far greater value to the Soviets than anything that the US might be willing to trade for it in terms of creating nuclear free zones elsewhere, i.e. in Italy and Turkey.

If the Soviet Union were certain that their missiles would soon be forced out of Cuba in any case, they might well prefer to gain something in exchange. For the present, however, the Soviets do not appear to have reached that conclusion and until further US actions are taken against the Soviet presence in Cuba, Moscow will probably not be convinced of the credibility of the US demands for the removal of the Soviet missiles.

Thus, from the Soviet point of view the value of denuclearization proposals lies in talking about them rather than in reaching agreements about them. Moscow would believe that its present tactical objectives would be well served by initiating diplomatic talks on atom-free zones, but would believe it had little to gain from concluding an agreement until it was convinced that the Cuban missile base was a lost cause.